



Saturday, October 25, 1997

## Perchlorate reported in California wells

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### Associated Press

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. -- Perchlorate, a toxic chemical whose presence in groundwater has caused a stir in Southern Nevada, has been found in drinking water wells of three San Bernardino County communities.

At high levels, the chemical used to make rockets and explosives can cause skin rashes and stomach problems. In extreme doses, it can cause a fatal blood disorder, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Wells in Rialto, Colton and Rancho Cucamonga tested positive for perchlorate this month, officials said Wednesday. The cities were informed of test results this week.

In Southern Nevada, environmental officials have measured the amount of perchlorate in wells and Lake Mead, the major source of water for Las Vegas. They are now trying to establish the extent and source of the contamination, hoping to begin cleanup by 1998.

California's worst case was in Rialto, where test results showed perchlorate at 30 parts per billion in a well, above the California's interim limit of 18 parts per billion, said city public utilities director Richard Wellington.

One drop of water in an Olympic-sized swimming pool is about one part per billion.

Wellington insists no residents drank water with dangerous levels of perchlorate because the contaminated well mixed its water with two clean wells before being distributed to homes.

"We want to assure all of our customers that water quality is of the utmost concern," he said.

Perchlorate may have leaked from any of several areas in north Rialto where munitions were stored in several bunkers during World War II, said general manager Butch Araiza of the West San Bernardino County Water District, which serves about 50,000 people in Rialto, Bloomington and unincorporated county areas around Fontana and Colton.

Those areas also housed several major fireworks companies and a Goodyear plant that might have made rocket fuel in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Araiza said.

Rialto is also home to a reserve well with 273 parts per billion of perchlorate, the highest level of

the chemical found in the region.

Officials are not sure about the source of perchlorate in Colton and Rancho Cucamonga.

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